LOUIS DUDEK

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June 8, 1964

"All poetry nowadays, anyhow, is someone's effort to save his soul." So wrote Louis Dudek in the first issue of his magazine Delta in October 1957. The "nowadays anyhow" is an interesting qualification. There were times perhaps when poetry could and did perform other functions. There were times when there were other means of saving one's soul. But "nowadays" poetry has taken on, as Arnold predicted it would, the burden previously borne by religion. Poetry, for Dudek, has a moral function to perform -- moral in the Arnoldian sense of "a criticism of life." "There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve," wrote Arnold, "...more and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry." Arnold saw poetry as the bulwark, in a secular society, against the degrading commercialism and industrialism of his day, against the insensitivity, mediocrity and flabbiness of Philistinism, against the effete aestheticism of "l'art pour l'art" and as "capable of wonderfully helping us to relate the results of modern science to our need for conduct, our need for beauty."

These are also essentially the views held by the Canadian humanist poet-critic Louis Dudek. For Dudek, as for Arnold, poetry is a serious search for moral truth. Therefore Arnold could say "For poetry the idea is everything.....poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the 'idea' is

the fact." And Dudek after him, ".....it is what you say with language that really matters." Arnold no more than Dudek would have accepted the new-critical dictum that poetry is primarily words, nor that of Northrop Frye that "in literature it isn't what you say but how it's said that matters." In a restatement of editorial policy in Delta recently Dudek writes somewhat cryptically:

"To extend the subject matter of poetry. In line with this, to look for new and necessary treatment and techniques. Poetry, with symbolism and formalism on the ascendant, lost almost all relevant content to prose..... Every resurgence of poetry in the past has come with a new sense of content. The subject matter is all here, crying for intelligent voices: it is simply the whole problem of dealing effectively in poetry with our moral and political void....."

The poet, for Dudek, must constantly take account of life as it is being lived. He must use words only to say honestly and simply what he thinks and feels about that life, to extract its essential meaning. His function is not to make decorative verses, forge new metaphors or illustrate myths, but rather to record in words the results of his personal explorations in the various dimensions of actuality and to share with the world his search for new depths of truth and beauty in human experience. Specifically, Dudek says, the modern poet's task is to "redeem the actual" -- to find "a way of knowledge and vision, practicable against the evil, unknown to the absinthe drinkers and the squares....." (better known to Arnoldians as the aesthetes and the Philistines.)

Dudek differs from Arnold in that he does not share Arnold's reliance on the residuum of literary culture. To the respect for the cumulative records of the past Dudek would prefer the simpler appeal of Wordsworth to nature and the direct salute of Whitman to immediate experience, albeit with the philosophical overtones of both these poets. For it is primarily in a joyous acceptance of nature and in a moral assessment of experience that the poet

appears as his own priest, his goal being moral wisdom and each poem an "effort" to save his soul." Furthermore, where Arnold, Dudek claims, merely defined the function of poetry, he himself has pursued that definition in the effort to discover the intellectual and religious bearings actually apprehensible through poetry. "The residue of religion in my work," he says, "appears as a modified transcendentalism, and the positivist scientific side of my thought appears as concreteness and realism. The effort to reconcile the two is at the core of all my poetry."

Louis Dudek at 46, tall, balding, gaunt, with a shy smile, a wistful manner and a twinkle in his eye, has acquired over the years a dignity of bearing that matches the soberness of his thoughts. He takes a serious view of life and poetry which embraces at once a shining idealism and a flat-footed realism. He is known in literary and academic circles for his strong opinions and soft speech, for his warm generosity and his unrelenting stubbornness, for his gentle manner and his hard-fisted polemics and most of all for his complete dedication to the cause of Canadian poetry. As a poet, he is still seeking a way to successfully relate the diaphanous wings of his lyric gift to the clay feet of his empirical philosophy. But in his larger role as a man of letters in mid-twentieth century Canada he has already achieved a stature of which at least a temporary assessment may be made.

Dudek was born a Roman Catholic, of Polish immigrant parents, in the east end of Montreal in 1918. As a schoolboy, inspired by Poems of the Romantic Revival, he wrote many verses in the fashion of Keats and Shelley. So did his sister. In fact the two saw themselves as friendly rival poets and it was decided that a meistersinger contest should be held to decide which of them could write the better poems. Father Bernard, the local parish priest, agreed to act as judge. Each of the young people submitted twenty-five poems, the fifty poems all being written down by the same hand. Father Bernard read the poems carefully. He named the best poems and it was revealed that fifteen-year-old Louis was the author of them. (His sister, no doubt disappointed at the time, is today his most enthusiastic reader.)

Young Dudek apparently did not doubt the Father's wisdom in regard to the merit of his poems. He continued to write poetry through high school. But sometime during adolescence he did begin to doubt the faith that the priest stood for. His subsequent rejection of organized religion and his ever-deepening concern for poetry are closely related. Growing up in a working-class milieu during the Depression years, Dudek came to believe that religion was incapable of measuring the complexities of modern life, that it took inadequate account of both the beauty and the horror of natural existence, that it favoured conservative and reactionary forces and that it was restrictive and inhibiting in its view of mankind. Poetry on the other hand offered an increasingly appealing way of assessing life. Poetry, Dudek began to believe, was not a matter of words and sound patterns or of literary allusions but of language made to faithfully render man's response to real experience. Life was not to be lived from a book, not even from The Book. And poems were to be made not from other poems but from life.

By the time Dudek entered McGill in 1936 he already entertained this serious view of poetry. Reading Nietzsche, Ibsen and D.H. Lawrence strengthened him in his rejection of religion. The compelling arguments of these reformers could not, he felt, be accommodated within a dogmatic faith. Reading Whitman, the Imagists, Sandburg, Spender and C. Day-Lewis, on the other hand, convinced him that poetry could, without sacrificing the actual -- indeed, rather by being saturated with actual experience -- say something of importance about reality. As an undergraduate he began publishing poems of social protest in the McGill Daily. As an Associate Editor of the Daily he also wrote editorials which were provocative enough occasionally to be reprinted in college papers across the country. Thus he was even then engaged in the dual activity of writing and editing which was to consume his interest in years to come. By the end of his college years, Dudek was convinced that his vocation was poetry, while as a profession he chose journalism. Upon graduation, therefore, he

set out as an apprentice journalist, getting the odd job with advertising agencies as a copywriter and doing free-lance writing for The Montrealer and other papers.

Meanwhile, he kept up his association with the young men of literary persuasion at McGill, spending his lunch hours and other free time at the offices of the student newspaper and continuing to publish poems in the Daily. Another poet publishing in the Daily at this time was Irving Layton. At a Literary Society meeting in 1940 the two men met and recognized each other as poets having much in common. Dudek was sufficiently enthusiastic about Layton's poetry to make it the object of his first publishing venture. Using the facilities and knowledge he had acquired at the Hayhurst Advertising Agency, Dudek set to work to produce a book of Layton's poems. The job was never completed but meanwhile the poets became close friends. Layton introduced Dudek to John Sutherland who in 1941 had begun to edit the Montreal little magazine First Statement. Dudek felt an immediate affinity with the aims of the new magazine. Within a short time he was closely engaged in its production. His name is readily associated with that of Layton and Sutherland in the poetic renaissance of the Forties; but looking back he now insists "I always felt myself 'third'. Sutherland was the leader and editor, Layton was 'the poet' -- we all expected he would soon be recognized -- and I was best at handling the mechanics of the printing press." The modesty of this reflection should not obscure the significance of Dudek's experience with First Statement. His direct association with the venture lasted only about two years but they were crucial years in his development.

In the first place, Dudek's knowledge of Canadian poetry was broadened. Editor John Sutherland had read fairly widely, especially in Canadian poetry, and knew personally or through correspondence many poets across the country even before he began First Statement. It was perhaps Sutherland's determination to foster a native tradition in poetry which served to strengthen Dudek's interest and to focus his attention on Canadian literature.

Secondly, the existence of the rival Montreal magazine Preview and its talented poet-editor Patrick Anderson stimulated the First Statement writers, Dudek among them, to read on the one hadn the British moderns, especially Auden, Barker and Dylan Thomas, in order to follow and to attack Anderson's poetic theory and practice. On the other hand Dudek read such American moderns as Hart Crane, Williams, Edgar Lee Masters, E.E. Cummings and Kenneth Fearing in order to find models and arguments for First Statement predilections. Such intensive reading and the ensuing vigorous debates helped Dudek to clarity and substantiate further his own views of poetry and its function. He became more adamant in his belief that poetry to be vital must be rooted in experience and must not become "literary" or be allowed to rest in conventional patterns. Reflections of his reading and his views can be seen in the poems he was writing at the times -- poems rich in social content and personal observation -- which vary from free verse to tightly structured rhythmic patterns with many experiments in between.

Thirdly, Dudek's share in the actual production of the magazine deepened his awareness of the dependence of literature upon the physical, material and economic exigencies of publication. Watching First Statement grow from its mimeographed form into print, learning to operate the rickety, ancient hand-press, contributing from his own pocket to buy paper on which to print, sharing reluctant decisions to cut size and format to suit financial means, these and many other practical aspects of publishing a literary magazine impressed upon Dudek the stringent conditions which society imposes on poets. It is typical of him that he could not accept these conditions without profoundly questioning them. Indeed he was to spend the next twenty years attempting to understand their origin and to overcome their pressure insofar as he could.

By the end of 1943, Dudek, employed by day as a copywriter in an advertising agency[1], was becoming restless in his job. He made a decision to leave

1 The writer sitting at the desk next to him writing French copy was Yves Thériault, today a well-known novelist. Dudek had early contact with several writers destined to effect a renaissance in French Canadian letters.

Montreal and to get out of the advertising field into something more central to journalism. He and his wife Stephanie, whom he had first met at a First Statement "open meeting", left in 1943 for New York where Dudek was to spend the next seven years.

His departure from Montreal did not, however, signify a loss of interest in the Canadian literary scene. Throughout the New York interlude he kept in close touch with Canadian friends. He corresponded regularly with Alan Crawley of the West Coast poetry magazine Contemporary Verse, with Raymond Souster of Toronto, and with Irving Layton and others in Montreal. He continued to publish poems and articles in First Statement even after it became amalgamated with Preview to form Northern Review. He retained strong sympathies with the First Statement elements in the new magazine and supported editor John Sutherland when he incurred the wrath and resignation of the Preview faction by his strong stand on the celebrated "Finch Issue."

Furthermore, while he was in New York, Dudek's recognition as a Canadian poet grew. As early as 1944 he had appeared as one of the poets presented in Unit of Five, edited by Ronald Hambleton and published by Ryerson. In 1946, Ryerson published his first separate book under the title East of the City. In 1947 he was well represented in Sutherland's Other Canadians; and several of his poems were included, the following year, in A.J.M. Smith's revision of his anthology The Book of Canadian Poetry.

Meanwhile, in New York, Dudek was being exposed to new ideas and new literary associations. He had originally registered at Columbia University for courses in journalism and history but found himself, in his second year, engaged in a Master's program, soon taking lectures in literature from Lionel Trilling and in history from Jacques Barzun and the Canadian historian J.B. Brebner.

Trilling's liberal ideas served to wrench Dudek from his rather narrow political base and to expose for him the superficiality of the brand of socialism which he had favoured while in Montreal. The ensuing change in

his political thinking and the increasing though grudging respect he was gaining for academic intellectuals were reflected in his letters at the time and were at least in part responsible for the eventual break in his relations with Layton who remained committed to more or less doctrinaire Marxism and who thoroughly detested academicians of any kind.

Professor Brebner's influence on Dudek was more personal and direct than Trilling's. The Canadian poet A.G. Bailey had written warmly of Dudek to his friend Brebner and as a result Brebner took a personal interest in his progress. Dudek had already conceived the plan of his Master's thesis -- it was to be a study of the effects of commercialism on writing under the title "Thackeray and the Profession of Letters" -- when Brebner persuaded him to read A Revolution in European Poetry by Emery Neff. The book made an impact on Dudek and when he later met the author he was even more strongly impressed. Neff was a scholar in the tradition of A.H. Thorndike at Columbia. Thorndike's Literature in a Changing Age and Neff's Carlyle clearly provided the lead for Dudek's growing interest in the sociology of literature. Under the influence of Emery Neff he decided to pursue, beyond the Master's level, his interest in the relation of literature to technological and commercial factors in civilization. He at first proposed to study the profession of letters "from Roman times to the present." But by the time he was ready to begin work on the topic, in the form of a doctoral thesis, it had been narrowed and focused on "The Relations between Literature and the Press."

Apart from his academic associations Dudek found many new friends in literary circles in New York. Among these the most important for his future career were the poet Paul Blackburn, the novelist Herbert Gold and Cid Corman, editor of the literary magazine Origin. He had also come under the influence of the poetry of William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound. It was while he was in New York, too, that he began his correspondence with Pound at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C. Through such associations Dudek kept in touch with current experiments in writing in the United States and was able to find outlets for

articles and for some of the poems which he continued prolifically to produce.

Thus during his years in New York Dudek's academic orientation grew stronger and his poetic development continued. Meanwhile his interest in journalism as a career was abandoned. Though he did some free-lance writing, his studies and his poetry now absorbed almost all his time and energy. As a graduate student he supported himself partially by odd jobs such as assistant in a biology laboratory, book-shipping clerk for a geological society, and door-to-door interviews for advertising agency surveys. But he was, by the late Forties, seriously preparing himself for an academic career. Desparate for money at one point, he rushed down to City College of New York to apply for a job teaching Sociology to evening students, since no openings were available in literature. As luck would have it, the Sociology office was closed by the time he arrived. "Just as well!" he says now, "I find it hard to imagine myself teaching Sociology! Any while I was standing outside the office feeling at a loss, someone told me of a position open in the English department and this time I was lucky enough to get the job." So it was that, as he began work on his doctoral thesis towards the end of his New York sojourn, he became not a journalist but a teacher. He found the experience not as alien to his taste as he had thought. He had previously believed that to be a journalist was to be in close touch with actualities. But journalists, to be successful, must too often take on the colour of their times. Dudek wanted very much to change the colour of the times, to be in a position to criticise and evaluate contemporary life. It was becoming clearer to him that for this purpose there were at least two more fundamental means than journalism. One was certainly poetry; and it began to seem likely that teaching was another.

At McGill University, meanwhile, the English Department had been attempting to establish a policy of having "Visiting Poets" on staff as lecturers for extended periods. Both A.M. Klein and Patrick Anderson had previously enjoyed

this distinction. In 1950, Dr. Harold Files, then chairman of the department, wrote to Louis Dudek inviting him to apply for such a position.

The idea of returning to Montreal appealed to Dudek. He was psychologically ready to come home. From the distance of New York he had mourned the lag in poetic activity in Canada which had set in after 1947. There were a variety of reasons for this lag, one being the dispersal of the leading writers who had supported the little magazines of the Forties, another being the growing conservatism of John Sutherland and his gradual disenchantment with Canadian moderns which, being reflected in Northern Review, eventually disqualified that magazine as an outlet for new Canadian writing. No other little magazine of comparable seriousness existed in Canada until Tamarack Review rose from the ashes of Northern Review in 1956. In the interim, Canadian commercial publishing houses, traditionally timid,. had again become reluctant to invest at a loss in Canadian writing, especially in poetry. Even Ryerson's, who had published the new poets generously in the 1940's, narrowed their scope on the retirement of Lorne Pierce from the firm.

Thus in 1950, Canadian poetry was languishing from neglect on the part of publishers. Dudek was convinced of this rather than of the possibility that no good writing was being done. As for himself, he had been pouring out poetry throughout all his years in New York. He was ready to publish. He had submitted a second manuscript to Ryerson's in 1950, and it was their decision to publish only a handful of his poems in chapbook form (The Searching Image) that perhaps set the spark to his discontent. "I thought a lot of myself in those days," he says now, "I believed myself to be a good poet and felt that my work deserved more attention that the commercial publishers were willing to give it."

The prospect of returning to Montreal as a "Visiting Poet" at McGill University was no doubt a pleasant boost to his ego. It was true, he still harboured some misgivings about the alliance of poetry with academic life. His appointment would seem ironic to those who remembered his injunctions

against such an alliance in the pages of First Statement (August, 1944). But he had gained considerable respect for some college professors since that time and it no longer seemed to him quite so inevitable that vigorous poetry could not survive in the atmosphere of the university.

So in 1951 he came home, carrying three significant possessions -- an unfinished Ph.D. thesis on the relations of literature and the press, a file of the American magazine Origin, and a determination to revitalize the poetry movement in Canada by initiating private publishing ventures.[2]

Upon arrival at McGill his exuberance was somewhat dulled by the discovery that the "Visiting Poets" policy no longer obtained. He found himself teaching, instead, English Composition and survey courses in the daytime, and a single course in modern poetry in the evening Extension Department of the University.

But being back in Montreal had other compensations. He was able to renew many old friendships with writers and to make contact with several younger poets eager for encouragement. And he had not been in town very long when he received a phone call from Betty Sutherland, then married to Irving Layton, urging him to reopen his heart to his old friend. The two had ceased to correspond since about 1947 when Layton had taken violent exception, in a

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2 He also brought home a file of his correspondence with Ezra Pound which doubtless served as an inspiration for much of his zeal in literary activity in the ensuing years. His admiration for Pound was that of a humble disciple for a great master. Though he regretted with others some of the excesses of Pound's political activity, he held in high regard the seminal power of Pound's literary theories, the combination of rage and realism in his poetry and role of impressario which Pound had played for so many young poets and poetry movements. Dudek's deep respect for Pound has made it difficult for him to accept at their face value the recent retractions attributed to the old poet. In a poignant article in Delta recently, Dudek has made a translation from the Italian of the interview in which Pound, almost incoherent, in halting, cryptic phrases, seems ready to retreat from the positions he spent a lifetime defending. In spite of his desire to correct this impression, Dudek's transl tion of Pound's words does little more than testify to his own devotion and his shocked consternation. He plans eventually to publish his correspondence with Pound and when it appears a more thorough study may be made of their literary and philosophic relationship.

series of letters, to Dudek's changing opinions, especially in regard to political thought, while he was at Columbia. The reconciliation made in 1951 was to prove fruitful for Canadian letters throughout the Fifties though by the end of that decade the two poets were to be again bitterly estranged.

Layton had, of course, been writing sparely but steadily throughout the Forties. But, aside from his frequent contributions of poems to magazines, he had published only one book (Here and Now) by 1950. Contrary to the expectations of those who had known and liked his work in the early days, Layton had not yet been "discovered" and acclaimed by either the commercial publishing houses or the critics. Even A.J.M. Smith, who had given Dudek's East of the City a favourable review in 1947 and included Dudek's poems in the 1948 revision of his anthology, had not as yet admitted the talent of Layton. Thus Layton himself was more than receptive in 1951 to Dudek's messianic enthusiasm in regard to publishing.

Raymond Souster, "the other First Statement poet from Toronto", had fared but a little better than Layton. He had appeared, along with Dudek, in Unit of Five (1944) and in a selection When We Were Young published by First Statement Press in 1946, and again in Go To Sleep World (Ryerson, 1947). In 1951, when Dudek returned, Souster was bringing out a little magazine, Contact, from his Toronto address, and nursing a growing file of his own unpublished poems, though Ryerson was scheduled to bring out a few of them in an eight-page chapbook (City Hall Street) that very year.

The three poet friends, with their common needs, grievances and dreams, met together in the summer of 1951 in a house on Dudek's grandmother's farm near Charlemagne, Quebec. On this occasion Dudek dumped on the table, in front of Layton and Souster, the file of Origin which he had brought back from New York. The three friends poured over the magazine. They spent many hours critically discussing its merits and its relevance to their own ambitions. Souster, it seems, was especially impressed by Cormam's magazine; Layton and

Dudek were more critical. At any rate, as Dudek was to write ten years later, "The result was a string of new writers in Souster's Contact, Layton's appearance in Origin, the Layton discovery by William Carlos Williams, and some of the new work in CIV/n, the magazine we started soon after."

The 1951 Charlemagne meeting had other important consequences. Shortly thereafter, the three poets, determined to see their own work published as well as that of other deserving Canadian poets, founded Contact Press. Souster's Toronto home address became the headquarters of the press but the editorial responsibility was shared equally by all three. Among books to come off the press in its first few years were Cerberus (poems by Dudek, Layton and Souster), Twenty-four Poems (Louis Dudek), Canadian Poems 1850-1952 (edited by Dudek and Layton), Love the Conqueror Worm (Layton, 1953) and The Transparent Sea (Dudek, 1956). The editors were also on the lookout for other worthy candidates among contemporary poets. The first result of their search was their publication of Trio (poems by Eli Mandel, Phyllis Webb, and Gael Turnbull) in 1954. Later, Contact Press was to publish the work of F.R. Scott, W.W.E. Ross, Geoge Walton and R.G. Everson, from among the older names; and books by Leonard Cohen, Henry Muscovitch, George Ellenbogen, Daryl Hine, D.G. Jones, Alfred Purdy and Alden Nowlan from among the younger poets.

Thus, particularly during the early Fifties, Contact Press played an important role in Canadian letters by providing an outlet for the new work of older poets and acting as an incentive and reward to the younger generation. A policy of rigorous selection of manuscripts on the basis of quality alone combined with non-commercial motives in publication won for Contact Press the respect of all those interested in Canadian poetry. By the end of the Fifties the imprint of Contact Press had become a prestige symbol among writers. Today in 1964 it is thriving, though its real success is not to be measured in money. Two of the founding editors remain, Layton having withdrawn in 1956 to attend to his own burgeoning career. Dudek and Souster have recently been

joined by the poet Peter Miller who shares their idealism and lends the practical aspect of his mind and generously sacrifices his pocketbook to the growing organizational needs of the enterprise.

There seems no doubt that the concept of this publishing venture originated with Dudek.[3] Contact Press exists today as a concrete expression not only of the enthusiasm and zeal with which he returned to the Canadian scene in 1951, but also of a deeply ingrained trait of his character: the determination to render his ideals into effective action.

Another example of this determination to make good ideas work is his activity among the younger poets of the Fifties. Shortly after returning to Montreal he had written an article "Où Sont les Jeunes?" (in Souster's Contact) calling for young writers to carry on the work of the Forties' generation. And he, together with Layton, helped found a little magazine, CIV/n, edited by Aileen Collins in Montreal, which was designed to stir up the local scene. CIV/n ran for only seven numbers but it had desireble effects. Younger writers attracted by it, or reacting against it, have since started little magazines of varying fortunes and merit but all playing their role of giving a public hearing to new poets.

One such recent magazine, Cataract, will be remembered perhaps chiefly for its contribution to the final break between Layton and Dudek. A rift

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3 Throughout the Fifties, until Peter Miller entered the partnership, Dudek undertook the production of the books, the editing, bookkeeping and even the financing for most of the volumes which were being published at a loss. D.G. Jones, a poet whose first book was brought out by Contact Press has subsequently been published by University of Toronto Press (The Sun is Axeman, 1961). As part of an inscription to the copy given to Dudek, Jones writes "Dear Louis.....If this book isn't exactly one of your children, it's one of your foundlings come home to say: Hey, Papa, Look, no hands -- at least someone else paid for the printing." Several other poets stand ready to echo D.G. Jones' sentiments.

between the two older poets had been growing since 1956 and in the ensuing years the younger poets in Montreal tended to split into camps in support of one or the other. Capitalizing on this state of affairs and hoping to attract attention to their magazine thereby, the youthful editors of Cataract solicited an article from Layton which appeared in their second number (Winter, 1962) under the title "An Open Letter to Louis Dudek." It was a scurrilous letter in Layton's practised style of personal abuse and four-letter invectives. It is difficult, upon reading it, to decide just what Layton was objecting to, since his attack was made in a confusing fashion, on several different levels -- personal, literary and ideological, to name a few. But it is clear that Layton treated Dudek as a traitor to a cause -- Dudek appears as a professed realist turned intellectual, as a proletarian turned bourgeois, as a man of the people turned academic and as a poet turned critic, among many other "infidelities." Most readers were appalled at the violence and crudeness of the letter. In its third and last number (July, 1962) Cataract printed a spirited defence of Dudek written by George Wilkinbogen. Dudek himself did not reply in print.

Layton and Dudek had been growing apart since 1956. That year had been an important one for each of them. Layton, having attracted the attention of the public and of commercial publishing houses both in Canada and in the United States, decided to withdraw from Contact Press and to strike out on his own. He was, indeed, about to embark on his astonishing, much-publicized career as Canada's best known and most controversial poet. In this phase of his development he has combined a rich poetic talent with a flamboyant campaign in public relations and has emerged a literary and financial success unprecedented in the histroy of Canadian poetry.

Dudek, on the other hand, claimed his doctorate from Columbia in 1955, advanced gradually to become Associate Professor within the English department at McGill, and published his doctoral thesis as a book under the title

Literature and the Press in 1956. Though he did not become as well known to the general public as Irving Layton, Dudek, within the next few years, won wide respect among literary and academic colleagues for his publishing enterprises, his critical articles, his lectures and poetry readings. He by no means gave up writing poems, nor his vocation as a poet. It was rather that his commitment to poetry as a way of life had broadened in its implications. Like Ezra Pound, whom he so much admired, Dudek felt the need to spread the gospel of poetry and to justify his faith by works as practical as possible. Thus the encouragement which he offered to young poets, for example, took the form not only of advice and criticism and financial assistance where needed but also of the establishment of further publishing outlets for their work.

To this end he embarked, towards the end of the Fifties, on two significant publishing enterprises. One was the founding of Delta magazine and the other the establishing of the McGill Poetry Series. The latter is largely a personal venture. It receives no kind of support from McGill University and is not subsidized. Yet the Series plays the important role of stimulating University students to creative endeavour, and it has so far produced a rather impressive array of young talent in the work of Leonard Cohen, Daryl Hine, George Ellenbogen, Sylvia Barnard, Dave Solway, Michael Malus and Pierre Coupey.

The other venture, Delta, is even more personal. Dudek founded the magazine in 1957 and financially and editorially it is a one-man show. The first few numbers were printed by hand, Dudek's own, on a press which he had bought for the purpose. The contents are selected by Dudek himself and often include his own articles and poems. The editorializing is not restricted to the "Editorial" page. Dudek describes Delta as "a complex of poetry..... interlarded with prose that aims to shake up the conventional subject matter of verse", but though Dudek occasionally prints letters from readers and

snippets of articles drawn from far and wide, he frequently takes the prerogative of appending his personal, often caustic, replies.

Delta by 1964 has run for twenty-three numbers, each one unfailingly stimulating. Dudek describes his decision to launch the magazine as "a great relief to me. At last I was free from editorial boards with their indecision and compromises. I could speak my own mind." He has done just that in Delta, and, apart from its value as a repository of new and refreshing poems by many writers, the magazine has revealed to its readers both the remarkable range of Dudek's interests and the peculiarities of his personality as well as the occasional depth of his thought.

Delta favours experimental poems and often deals editorially with questions of verse technique. In this respect the magazine is helpful to anyone trying to follow Dudek's own development as a poet. Over the years he has exhibited widely varying styles in his poems and if readers fail to detect a lasting and distinctive "Dudekian" motif, he himself will share their difficulty. He is still searching for style -- "metrical structure" is the term he prefers. His predilection of late years has been for a loose, organic rhythm -- "The ear is the only measure of music", he says -- and for visually oriented verse patterns rather than rhetorical structures. His admiration for E.E. Cummings is partly based on that poet's experiments in calligraphy; and he has devoted many pages of Delta to poems which explore the possibilities inherent in the distribution of black letters on white paper. Students of his poetry will also find "Functional Poetry" (Delta, No. 8) and "Lac en Coeur" (Delta, No. 10) of considerable interest. They reveal Dudek's intense striving to fuse "things" with "words", to eliminate as far as possible the distinction between the experience and the poem, between life and literature.

Implicit here is a theory which sets Dudek in fundamental opposition to at least three other possible veiws of poetry current in Canada -- the literary allusive traditionalism of a poet like Roy Daniells, the witty seriousness of a George Johnston, and the myth-structured poetry of James Reaney. Dudek is

especially reactive to the last of these. He has frequently used the pages of Delta to make forays against myth, attacking it with the same fervour he uses to attack religion. Indeed he senses that the mythic consciousness is an aspect of the religious consciousness and berates the "myth critics" for relegating poetry to the position of handmaid just as religion had done. Precisely because for Dudek poetry is a religion -- poetry is his way of relating to and evaluating existence -- he deplores what he feels is a relapse into prescientific orientation. "The obsession with myth and symbolism is pathological," he says without qualification. His whole life has been directed to the establishment of "conscious and enlightened poetry" as the vehicle for that dimension of experience which once was embodied in pagan and Christian myth. His realist aesthetic, being historical, empirical and sequential can never come to terms with the a-historical, allusive, symbolic aesthetic derived from myth. Dudek is well aware of this. His antipathy to the poetry of Reaney and others of the "school of Frye" is founded on his rejection of the critical archetypal monism of Northrop Frye which Dudek regards as having strong theistic overtones (See Delta, No. 22).

Another of the themes frequently sounded in Delta is the relation of poetry to science. Poetry being Dudek's word for Arnold's "culture," the theme is a transposition into twentieth-century terms of Arnold's nineteenth-century campaign. Like Arnold, Dudek believes that poetry can redeem science. Like Wordsworth, Dudek believes that the poet's function is partly to stand at the side of the man of science, "humanizing and transfiguring" the changes the scientist makes in our mode of existence. Like his own contemporary, C.P. Snow, Dudek deplores the existence of two cultures and strives to find a mode of union between the sciences and the humanities. "By a criticism of science, and a criticism of romantic atavism, the two may be brought together" he says. His scientific interests veer, however, to the sciences of Psychology and Biology, these two being most likely to free men and women from the taboos and inhibitions with which religion has saddled them for centuries. Thus, frequently he devotes

pages of Delta to discussion of the ideas of Julian Huxley, N.J. Berrill, C.P. Martin and other scientists of an acceptable philosophic persuasion.

A refreshing aspect of Delta is the frequent inclusion of translations from poetry in other languages. Dudek has Polish, Russian, Italian, German and French at his command for such translations and the result is that the readers of Delta are often treated to insights into the work of contemporary foreign poets. But Dudek's linguistic ability is most telling when lent to the Canadian scene. He has developed in recent years a strong interest in the poetic renaissance in French Canada. His command of French permits him to lecture in that language at the University of Montreal, to mingle easily with the French writers and publishers in Quebec, to engage in co-authorship of a book (Montreal, Paris of America) with the French-Canadian poet Michel Régnier and to keep his English readers of Delta informed of developments in French-Canadian life and letters. He has recently taken an interest in the broader implications of French-Canadian nationalism and while on the one hand, in the pages of Delta and elsewhere, he seeks to interpret French-Canadian thought to English Canadians, on the other he is cautioning French Canada not to destroy itself by accepting the extreme views of Separatists. Certainly among literary critics, Dudek is among the very few to be intimately concerned with modern movements in both English- and French-Canadian writing.

Thus Delta, while serving as an organ of opinion for Dudek himself, provides readers with a rich awareness of the Canadian literary scene and so constitutes one of his important contributions to Canadian letters. The magazine costs him money, time and energy, and he has often talked of giving it up; but if and when he does, the Canadian literary consciousness will have lost a valuable and perhaps (because it is so personal) an irreplaceable facet of expression.

Delta, the McGill Poetry Series, Contact Press, are but the major publishing activities of Dudek in the past fifteen years. Yet considering

only these, one may well wonder how and when all his zeal was generated. The inspiration for it came during his predoctoral days at Columbia University in the late Forties. Perhaps the original animus even for that was his early publishing experience in Montreal which gave him his first insight into the plight of serious literature in an industrailized, commercialized culture. At any rate, students who are curious will find abundant documentation of his interest in this topic in his book Literature and the Press. The book was the eventual result of the "unfinished doctoral thesis" he had brought back to Montreal in 1951. He had, in other words, been working on the material in this book throughout the period of his most intensive preoccupation with Contact Press and the policies of the Press are clearly an application of the principles established in the book. Literature and the Press is dedicated to the purpose of "clarifying the condition of the artist as writer in a world of mass addiences," and it insistently documents the ill effects of commercial publishing on literature as an art.

It is ironic that as a book, Literature and the Press must be considered a failure. To many readers it appears to be a painful exercise in the methods of graduate school reserach. But evennapart from its form, the book suffers badly when compared to the almost concurrent work in a similar field by Marshall McLuhan. The topic so laboriously "reserached" by Dudek was already being so radically reinterpreted by McLuhan (albeit in his own execrable jargon) that Dudek's concepts appear naive, his methods pedestrain, and his conclusions outoof date or irrelevant. Furthermore, thought Literature and the Press is a veritable mine of facts about the history of publishing, even its academic usefulness is diminished by its strange lack of both an index and a bibliography.

Nevertheless, the book stands as an illumination of the prime and fundamental concerns of Dudek as a man of letters over a period of twenty-five years. In it, he tracks down his long-standing conviction of the essential antagonism between literature and the conditions of modern society. His

search for factual documentation of this antagonism led him to retrace the history of publishing from Gutenberg to the present. He discusses in detail the mechanical operations of printing presses from the simplest to the most modern and complex; the economic advantages of such discoveries as the making of paper from pulp; technological improvements which facilitated mass publication; the growth and policy changes of literary magazines, reviews and newspapers; the emergence of publishing as a commercial enterprise; and the effects of all these and many other factors on the writer and on literary values. The most readable chapter in the book deals with literary magazines and shows convincingly -- and prophetically -- the importance of the private literary effort in the form of the "little magazine." Having finished the book, the reader no longer wonders at Dudek's zeal for publishing. One clearly understands his devotion to Contact Press, Delta and the McGill Poetry series when one reads his conviction that "within the machine and money-profit system, the survival of civilized arts and literature can be maintained only in areas where neither quantity production nor money play a leading role."

Dudek's literary energies were not entirely expended in publishing and writing poems. He has also produced, since 1951, a number of critical articles. Aside from specific studies of Pratt (Tamarack, Review No. 6) and Klein (Canadian Forum, 1957), Lampman (Culture, 1957) and the exchange with A.J.M. Smith in which Dudek defended Layton's poetry (Queen's Quarterly, Summer, 1956), he has written general articles concerning various stages of the history of Canadian poetry such as "The Transition in Canadian Poetry" -- between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries -- (Culture XX, 1959), "The State of Canadian Poetry in 1950" (Canadian Forum, October, 1954), "Patterns in Recent Canadian Poetry" (Culture XIX, 1958) and "Canada's Literature of Revolt" (The Nation, October, 1962). In such articles he has naturally displayed an intimate knowledge of both the history and current activity of poetry in Canada. His critical preferences, being deeply rooted in his philosophy of

life, lead him to express a persistent bias in favour of the realist poet. He is occasionally uncritically generous in his praise of poets like Souster, the early Layton, Alfred Durdy and Alden Nowlan. On the other hand he gives short shrift to the stylistically more complex "literary" poets of either the classical, metaphysical or mythic varieties. He would like, it would seem, to dispose of the rivals to his favourite poetic mode by pronouncing them already dead in one way or another -- characterizing the traditionalists as the "stiff-jointed older boys", and the myth poets as the "young of yesterday" and as "really a digression or even a regression of a kind; interesting but not very promising." Critically, his disenchantment with Layton, reflected in his Culture article of 1958 and in his Delta (No. 15) review "Layton on the Carpet" would seem to stem mainly from his detection of new mythic dimensions and symbolic overtones in Layton's poetry. The perceptiveness which much of his criticism displays is, however, often nullified by his tendency to overstate his case. The French have a saying: "If you want to get rid of your dog, accuse him of having rabies." Dudek tends, as a critic, to do something very much like this with poets who do not win his approval.

Several of his most recent articles have revealed the broader humanistic range of his interests. Dudek is of the modern variety of humanists who may be called scientific, if this signifies a concern with cultural matters in their contemporary scientific milieu rather than the traditional humanist's orientation towards a literary and religious cultural heritage. Of the articles revealing Dudek's humanistic leanings, "Art, Entertainment and Religion" (Queen's Quarterly, Autumn, 1963) is a sorry example. In a galloping survey of Western culture, Dudek seeks to show that in the modern world "entertainment", born of a spurious union of commercialism and "irreligion" has usurped the place of art. The article is murky, pedantic and filled with windy and confused generalizations. Whatever truth there is in it (and certainly it reveals some provocative insights) is almost wholly obscured by his rhetorician's trick of

making one word, religion, stand for many different forces, all of them deplorable, against which the artist is obliged to struggle. His most obvious though perhaps unconscious rhetorical device is to identify religion with Puritanism or narrow dogmatism and then to beat it for not being the "the beautiful open question" which he feels religion should be. The article is not to his credit, either as a thinker or as a writer.

He is on a much sounder footing in "Communication and the World Today" which appeared in Culture in the summer of 1962. Here he is obviously drawing on the material from his book and in his expansion of it, he is at ease with telling facts and provocative opinions, especially about the weaknesses and shortcomings of the commercial press. That the article foundd its mark is evident from the reproof appearing in the editorial column of the Montreal Star under the heading "Really, Mr. Dudek!"

As far as poetry is concerned, apart from the experimental poems appearing in Delta and elsewhere, Dudek has produced three books in the past ten years. Europe (1954) is a long, loosely-structured poem which records his impressions of his travels. The most successful portions of it deal with the sea in many different moods. Dudek's preoccupation with the sea, in this poem and others, is significant. As an imagge it comes as close to acting as an archetype for him, being the "Creative Chaos", the source of life, the shape of meaning. Structurally, "the sea is the only measure of music," and its loose organic rhythms are those which Dedek attempts to imitate in his verse.

Laughing Stalks (1958)is quite different in structure and tone, being a collection of satirical poems. En Mexico (1958) is another travelogue but stylisticelly at the opposite pole from Europe. Its form is tight, cryptic,

laconic, with sometimes as few as two lines appearing on a page. Dudek's potential as an exquisite lyricist is revealed in such lines as:

> Study the way of breaking waves
> for the shape of ferns,
> fire and wind
> for whatever blows or burns.

while towards the end of the poem, the reflective philosophically-inclined Dudek writes:

> Like the virile leaping of goats
> in a green valley,
> love's restorative power
> leaps to the heart.
>
> Form is the visible part of being.
> We know, the logic of its adaptations--
> a signature of individuality,
> an integrity,
> the end of perfect resolution--
> but not the inner stir.
>
> Rest. Rest in that great affair.
>
> Therefore art is everything;
> but not as we imagined.
> Art is really the way of life.

Dudek is currently at work on a long poem to be called Atlantis. He has already presented some parts of it on the CBC, at a Toronto poetry reading, and also at a meeting of the Canadian Authors Association. Sections have also been published in various magazines. It appears so far as a brooding, religious essay along the lines of Wordsworth's Prelude. It is, Dudek says, "about God and Politics and Reality all at once without presenting these as a rational discursive idea." In the parts read so far, he allows his thoughts to wander freely through history and the present, through all the countries he has lived in and visited, through all the various experiences he has had. It is a yearning, melancholic, meditative poem revealing occasionally his anger, his laughter, his love, but suffused with a wistful anguished searching for moral truth.

It is a search for form also. The poet who long ago gave up organized religion as the formal vehicle of moral truth and who today strongly resists the mythic and symbolic projections of this dimension, of experience, is still engaged in the task he set himself as a young man: to find an alternative style of expression which will make poetry the mode of redemption. Whether he ever finds his new Atlantis, or rediscovers the old, lost, submerged continent, may be mainly a matter of record in his personal spiritual odyssey, but as a poem Atlantis promises to be an important major work.

Thus far then, Louis Dudek, poet, publicist, critic,-- a man of letters in Canada who, though still young, has already won for himself, through his many and varied contributions, a secure place in the history of modern Canadian literature.